

Including Partnership, Self-Renewal, and Networking Mechanisms in West African Extension Policies

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Abstract

This paper aims at learning lessons from recent extension policymaking practices in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger in West Africa. Similar policymaking processes lead to context-based extension policy content. However, extension policy should include (i) strategic partnerships with the private sector, research and education organizations, (ii) self-renewal mechanisms for responding to environmental changes, and (iii) mechanisms for national extension systems to take advantage of global experiences of policymaking, implementation, and evaluation.

Introduction

The contribution of many scientific disciplines (agricultural economics, sociology, management, communication, psychology) resulted in broadening the scope of rural extension, from the transfer of technology to facilitation. Subsequently, reforming extension systems revealed itself to be a big challenge. Within the framework of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Pillar IV of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), many countries in West Africa are currently developing agricultural and extension policies. National agricultural policies are expected to align with the CAADP Pillar IV. Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger have launched extension policies: the national strategy for agricultural extension (SNCA) in Benin, the national strategy of agricultural extension and support (SNVACA) in Burkina Faso, and the integrated support system for rural development (DIAC) in Niger. These extension policies are built on the 1990s experiences of liberalisation policy that led to pluralistic extension systems. Henceforth, non-governmental agencies can organise and finance extension services under the coordination and the regulation of the government. Extension policies are expected to contribute to the implementation of agricultural and rural development policy: the strategic plan for the boosting the agricultural sector (PSRSA) in Benin, the strategy document for rural development (DSDR) in Burkina Faso, and the strategy for rural development (SDR) in Niger. The objective of the note is to share lessons learned in terms of policymaking practices, rather than to extensively present or evaluate extension policies, nor to recall general strategic planning processes.

Methodology

I analysed the recent extension policymaking processes / practices in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger. In the three countries, agriculture contributes significantly to gross domestic product and most people in rural areas are farmers. Compared to Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger are located in more arid zone where pastoralism is a core component of agriculture. Benin and Burkina Faso are more advanced in continental and global networking on

extension. This paper is based on literature review and on personal research and consultancy experiences in West Africa. Comparative analysis of the three policy development processes helped to learn lessons on how to develop a relevant, consensual, and context-related extension policy. First, I draw from the academic literature some key attributes of good extension policy. Second, I use the three case studies to draw a generic policymaking pathway. In conclusion, I discuss this pathway in light of the key attributes of good extension policy framework.

How should a good extension policy framework look? Lessons from academic research

In the academic literature, I found many attributes of good extension policy. It should be characterised by

- i. accuracy of objectives, principles, mechanisms, and strategies (e.g. for coordination, accountability, funding, evaluation, lesson learning);
- ii. flexibility: the policy framework should be flexible enough to integrate new approaches and methods generated through new experiences, specific areas (e.g. dam or forest areas), and emerging issues (e.g. climate change) that can contribute to goal achievement;
- iii. coherence with other agricultural services, especially research and education policies; and
- iv. capacity for adjustment to environmental changes: this is important for the self-renewal of extension approaches.

Extension policy should then foster the openness of national extension systems to incorporate (?) continental and global experiences.

How to develop extension policy in practice: lessons from Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger

Setting extension priority agricultural commodities is important to focus on the essentials

Agricultural development policy, as a larger policy framework, sets commodity priorities based on competitive advantages of the country. Thirteen commodities¹ were targeted in Benin, six commodity networks² in Burkina Faso, and seven commodities³ for specialized extension services in Niger. These priorities should guide the extension policy development.

Getting key actors participating in policy process is necessary to increase commitment and ownership

The Ministries of Agriculture (MAEP in Benin, Ministry of Rural Development in Burkina Faso, and MRA in Niger) led the elaboration of the national extension policies. They used participatory processes with diagnostic and conception phases, which took a relatively long time (e.g. nine months in Benin). Multilevel workshops were organised to involve stakeholders in the processes (e.g. in Burkina Faso several at the village, four at the regional, and one at the national level). Farmers participated at the village level by sharing information, observations, and opinions. Farmer, non-governmental, and research organisations, as well as private consultants, agricultural chambers, and public extension

¹ Food crops (rice, maize, cassava, yam, bean, groundnut) - Vegetables (tomato, onion, pepper) - Cash crops (cotton, palm oil, pineapple, cajou)

² Cereals, bean, tubers, cotton, fruits, vegetables and oleaginous

³ Cattle, leathers and skins, rice, sweet pepper, rubber, sesame, potatoes

organisations contributed to the process at regional and national levels. In Niger an ad hoc technical board was set up to follow-up and to validate the policy document.

Characterising farmers' needs helps to identify the required types of extension services

Conducting diagnostics to identify challenges

During the diagnostic phase similar challenges in the three countries identified. Extension systems based on the transfer of technology did not sufficiently meet farmers' increasingly complex and diversified needs. The family farming and farm management dimensions specifically were not sufficiently taken into account / considered. The extension services provide were not market-oriented. In the view of these new shortcomings, the available human resources were no longer appropriate. Weakened by the liberalisation policies of the 1990s, governments lacked resources to coordinate pluralistic extension systems.

Portraying appropriate extension

Based on the prominent elements identified through the diagnostic approach, a vision of what extension should be was developed. The SNCA in Benin refers to extension as agricultural advisory services (*conseil agricole*) defined as a methodological support process to farmers and farmer organizations for rational decision making, implementation and evaluation. The concept of extension in Burkina Faso (*vulgarisation et appui-conseil*) is inspired by the reflection of Neuchâtel Group. The SNVACA defined extension as facilitation, which aims at improving farmers' life quality through providing them with appropriate knowledge and skills based on their needs and demands. The DIAC is silent on the definition of extension referred to as support services (*services d'appui-conseil*). Extension concepts are different in the three countries. However, extension is now envisioned as having the goal of contributing to sustainable agricultural development, economic growth and poverty reduction.

Setting new extension objectives, principles, and funding mechanisms

Setting objectives of extension and identifying the types of extension services

The overall objective of extension in **Benin** is to improve technical and economic performance of farmers and farmer organizations through better decision-making processes. For farmer organisations, the improvement of performance includes better governance. Subsequently, four types of advisory services were selected for a first phase of implementation: specialised technical advice, management advice for family farms, advice on market access, and advice on organisational and local planning. In **Burkina Faso**, extension is aimed at improving agricultural productivity and production and the sustainability of natural resources, strengthening the capacity of actors and promoting dialogue frameworks and partnerships. For this purpose, the main types of extension are participatory technology development, transfer of technology (based on technical experimentation and innovation centres, farmer field schools and model farms), and advice for farm enterprises. The objective of extension in **Niger** is to provide close support to farmers for the improvement of food security and revenue. To achieve this objective, two types of services are identified: (1) public support to the poorest and most vulnerable farmers practicing subsistence agriculture, and (2) specialised support to profitable commodity crops (water dam rice, cattle, onion, gum Arabic, etc.) in districts with important production potentials. The attributes of extension designs are generally not linked to priority

commodity value chains in the three countries. The types or methods of extension are generally too narrow to ease the integration of newly developed methods such as value chains, farmer business schools, competitive agricultural systems, and enterprises.

Identifying guiding principles

The six principles of agricultural advisory services in Benin are contracting of services, subsidiarity in service provision, complementation between actors, free adherence of farmers to learning groups, mutual trust between farmers and extension agents, and co-financing of extension. The SNVACA in Burkina Faso is based on eight principles: inclusion of local knowledge in agricultural information systems, responsibility of actors, the definition of an investment/extension ratio, contracting of services, strengthening of the research-development link, taking gender into consideration, taking regional specificities into consideration, and the reorientation of the role of the government to regulation functions. The DIAC in Niger mentions no clear principles. The principles of extension fit within the Framework for African Agricultural Productivity (FAAP) in the three countries.

Defining funding mechanisms

The funding mechanisms are still too vaguely defined to be really operational or effective in the three countries. The plans are as follows: The government of Benin intends to mobilize funds to support extension services at the beginning of the policy implementation. In the middle of the implementation, the different forms of the contributions of the clientele and other public and private stakeholders should be identified. In the long term, national funding for agricultural advisory services may become a budget item within the National Agricultural Development Funds (FNDA). In Burkina Faso, the plan is for the government, development partners, and farmers to all contribute to the agricultural development funds (FDA) to finance the SNVACA. The government of Niger intends to finance extension for the first phase of five years. In the second phase, the plan is for the National Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral Funds (FNSASP) to finance extension.

Assessing the context of extension to identify limiting factors for weaving partnerships

This step aims at weaving partnerships with other agricultural development institutions to make sure they deliver services that are suited to observed/foreseen trends for extension. Key stakeholders, especially in agricultural research and education, are not yet adjusting their contribution to development according to the requirement of new extension policy. For instance, agricultural education is not sufficiently adjusting curricula to provide extension providers with appropriate human resources. The policymaking processes did not clearly conduct environmental assessment in the three countries.

Conclusion

Recent policy making processes in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger led to concepts, objectives, principles, and typologies/methods of extension that are different from one country to another, but all are aligned with the FAAP. However, extension policy attributes should be clearly linked to the characteristics of the value chains of selected commodities in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints. Extension policy should include strategic partnerships with agricultural research and education organisations to

make two-way adjustments possible. Extension policy should also plan mechanisms to integrate any new useful extension methods or response to important environmental changes. Mechanisms should be set up for national extension systems to take advantage of international experiences in policy making, implementation, and evaluation.

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